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Abstract of the paper of the Committee on Space Research

1. The traditional role of the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) is to provide a meeting ground for scientists involved in fundamental research and then to provide the means for rapid publication of results. Over four decades, providing that service has brought recognition to COSPAR as the premier forum for presenting the most important results in space research in all disciplines. During that period COSPAR has also become the world's largest professional, self-governing body of space scientists, with a membership composed of 40 national scientific institutions, 12 international learned bodies and over 4,000 individual and industrial associates.

2. The growing societal importance of coupling space science to technology and of deploying efforts to aid the development of human intellectual potential has brought a new emphasis to the Committee's activities in several ways. In addition to strengthening its traditional cooperation with the International Astronautical Federation, which has resulted in a series of symposia organized jointly on an annual basis for the past 15 years during the scientific and technical sessions of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, COSPAR has created a new class of membership to respond to the needs of industrial organizations with an interest in space. It is hoped that that link will increase the Committee's range of activities and allow the practical needs of industry to be better understood and assimilated into future plans for space exploration. It is hoped in particular that the synergy between the innovation so natural to the scientist and the understanding of market forces so pre-eminent in industry will create better conditions for the rapid conversion of results from investigations of near-Earth space into technologies mature enough for application.

3. In order to react properly to potential opportunities created by a better understanding of and possible dangers resulting from natural processes in space, COSPAR recently created two new panels, on space weather and planetary protection. The aim is to monitor closely and, if feasible, to influence the development of understanding and policy in those areas.

4. COSPAR can also offer considerable expertise in coordinating activities that are of particular interest to less developed nations that intend to participate in space programmes. For almost two decades, COSPAR, through its Panel on Space Research in Developing Countries, has run a special programme that promotes in those countries space research in disciplines important from the point of view of the interested parties.

5. In a related activity, COSPAR, recognizing the paramount importance of investment on the part of the scientific community in the development of human potential, also plans to launch a series of specialized workshops whose aim will be to contribute to the general programme of capacity-building in science that is currently being discussed within the

Committee's mother organization, the International Council for Science (ICSU). Specifically, COSPAR action will be aimed at reducing the isolation of scientists in countries where the scientific infrastructure is not greatly developed by helping to integrate local research activities into the mainstream of space science currently being conducted elsewhere.

6. Another important role assumed by COSPAR is to act as an intermediary, facilitating direct contacts between scientists from different geographical areas. This activity is carried out across the whole spectrum of space disciplines and is supported by a COSPAR-sponsored and COSPAR-organized programme of financial assistance. The main effort is directed towards supporting attendance at scientific meetings. This activity has always been very strongly present in COSPAR programmes.

7. COSPAR's record as the most representative international scientific organization on all matters related to research in space puts it in the position of a well-tested machine, instrumental for efficient and rapid dissemination of the newest results pertaining to all areas of space research and able to promote a truly unbiased and global assessment of proposed programmes of exploration in space.